

To whom it may concern:

Last legislative session Senator Joe Balyeat introduced bill NO. 336 "An act authorizing the use of trained, controlled dogs to track wounded game animals; Amending section 87-3-124, MCA; and providing immediate effective date."

I supported this bill as I am and continue to remain in disgust of the amount of wounded and unrecovered big game animals. This happens primarily during the archery season. As a professional sportsman I feel it is my job to find any wounded animals. The benefits of this include recovering the meat of the lost animal before it has time to spoil. Most hunters that fail to recover a wounded animal simply continue to hunt, which results in potentially more animals wounded and lost. The use of controlled tracking dogs just makes common sense. Tracking dogs are used with great success in primarily eastern and southern states.

When Senator Balyeat introduced the bill I immediately lobbied for its passing. The Game Wardens Association opposed it, so I called the chief fish and game officer in Helena, who I know and respect and asked why the opposition. His primary reason for opposing it was that he said it was already legal! I exclaimed that it is the best kept secret in MT as most if not all wardens would not know that let alone the rank and file sportsmen! He assured me it was, so I preceded to ask what if questions. "If you were tracking a wounded big animal in big game season with a leashed dog can I carry either a firearm or a bow?" Answer was "absolutely." The next question was "if I was tracking the wounded animal with a leashed dog in a legal hunting season and IF that animal was not dead could I shoot over the top of that animal to collect the wounded animal?" The answer was "absolutely". At this point I agreed with the chief of law enforcement for the MDFWP. Why have a bill if it was already legal.

After hanging up with the chief law enforcement officer for the MDFWP, I immediately called our Region 3 warden captain and told him of my recent conversation. His response was "you heard it from the horse's mouth!" We then spoke of the common sense of carrying a firearm in either rifle or archery season while engaged in any leashed dog tracking efforts." "Who wants to be out on a blood trail of a mortally wounded animal without some sort of means of protection?" The Region 3 captain then went on to say "it was also your second amendment right to carry a firearm and protect yourself and they did not want to be in a position to oppose that!" I hung up the phone realizing common sense has prevailed and that it was now lawful to use a tracking dog under the restraints and with conditions we spoke about!

When the new 2010 MDFWP proclamations came out I eagerly looked in the regulations about the use of tracking dogs as, it was never previously mentioned. To my dismay the regulations say:

DOGS

MCA 87-3-124 states that a person may not use dogs to hunt or chase game animals. Dogs may be utilized to recover or locate wounded big game but the hunter may not possess a bow or firearm while doing so.

It is obvious that it is time to make a common sense bill that allows for the retrieval of wounded animals with the aid of a leashed dog. Hunters must be allowed to shoot over the top of wounded game and be able to carry a firearm to protect themselves from large predators like grizzly bears, black bears and wolves.

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